

Let's Talk about Celibacy! How Western Christian Culture Affects the Construction of Sex, Body, and Gender in Popular and Scholarly Discourses

Stefanie Knauss

The periodical or permanent abstinence from sexual activity is a cultural and religious practice that can be found across historical and cultural contexts. Contemporary religious and non-religious discourses in the western context promote celibacy in consciously secular terms as a hip and even sexy lifestyle choice of the career-conscious and self-determined modern woman and man and idealize it as a possibility – especially for women – to find freedom, energy and subjecthood. At first sight, this seems far removed from the traditional Christian understanding of celibacy as an exercise of discipline over an unruly body that brings the believer closer to God, or the more secular view of celibacy as a rather sad sign that something is wrong with the celibate person. While I consider the oft-stated intention to develop a positive understanding of celibacy and to broaden the notion of sexuality to include celibacy as a form of sexuality in its own right a positive and important contribution of celibacy discourses at this moment, my analysis of popular and scholarly discourses about celibacy also highlights problematic aspects that counteract these attempts. As I will argue in this contribution from the perspective of Christian feminist theology, the apparently fundamental transformation in the understanding of celibacy from a repressive to an emancipatory practice has changed little in how discourses construct worldviews, social realities and identities, in particular with regard to sex, body and gender.

Celibacy; gender; body; sexuality; internet; body/mind dualism

Stefanie Knauss is an Associate Professor of Theology and Culture at Villanova University (USA). Her research focuses on theology and culture, body and religion, gender/queer studies and theology. Recent publications: *More than a Provocation: Sexuality, Media and Theology* (Göttingen 2014); edited with Anna-K. Höpflinger and Alexander D. Ornella: *Commun(ica)ting Bodies: Body as a Medium in Religious Symbol Systems* (Zurich/London 2014/2015).

1. Introduction

The periodical or permanent abstinence from sexual activity is a cultural and religious practice that can be found across historical and cultural contexts. As Michael Carrither notes, it can be seen as a form of “sociocultural creativity applied to even so basic a desire and activity as sex”. As such, different forms of

Let's Talk about Celibacy!

and discourses about celibacy reflect and construct, as he writes, “different ways of making a world”.¹ In a Christian context, celibacy – promoted as the better (although not the only) way to live a Christian life in service to God and others (1 Cor 7:7) – has contributed to the creation of an understanding of the body as problematic and primarily defined through its sexual urges, which are considered sinful, even the (original) sin *par excellence*.² In addition, celibacy discourses reinforce the association of sex, body and sin with woman, epitomizing Eve as the paradigmatically sinful, sexualized woman. Overcoming the sexual nature of the female body in abstaining from sex then “masculinizes” a person, so that celibacy might be understood as a (trans)gendering practice, as it is reflected in the notion of the ascetic woman as an “honorary man”³.

Today, however, religious and non-religious discourses promote celibacy in consciously secular terms as a hip and even sexy lifestyle choice⁴ of the career-conscious and self-determined modern woman and man, endorsed by “celi-brities”⁵ and idealized as a possibility – especially for women – to find freedom, energy and subjecthood.⁶ At first sight, this seems far removed from the traditional religious understanding of celibacy as an exercise of discipline over an unruly body that brings the believer closer to God and contributes to the creation of the “ideal” (masculine) being, and equally far removed from the more secular view of celibacy as a rather sad sign that something is wrong with the celibate person. While I consider the oft-stated intention to develop a positive understanding of celibacy and to broaden the notion of sexuality to include celibacy as a form of sexuality in its own right a positive and important contribution of celibacy discourses at this moment, I also notice problematic aspects that counteract these attempts. As I will argue here from a feminist-theological perspective, a closer look at contemporary celibacy discourses shows that this apparently fundamental transformation in the understanding of celibacy from repressive to emancipatory practice has changed little in how discourses about celibacy “make a world”, in particular with regard to sex, body and gender, because they continue dualist understandings of the human person and reinforce a hierarchical binary gender system. In the following, I will present the results of my analysis of popular and scholarly celibacy discourses and conclude with suggestions for how to further the discussion of celibacy.

1 Carrither 2001, p. viii.

2 Cf. Karras 2012, p. 34.

3 Cf. Elliott 2013, pp. 24 f.

4 Cf. Internet sources: Celibate: Aims and Objectives; see also Internet sources: gwendolyn bond-upson.

5 See for example Internet sources: Urban Chastity: 25 Celebrities.

6 Cf. Bell / Sobo 2001, p. 15.

2. Terminology: Abstinence, Celibacy, Chastity

Talking about celibacy is not easy because several different terms – abstinence, celibacy and chastity – are used, and not always consistently. Originally, each term had a very specific meaning. In early Christianity, when celibacy first became a popular movement, it simply meant being unmarried, which excluded sexual activity in a moral schema in which sexuality was limited to the context of marriage. Chastity meant the absence of illicit sexual acts, such as unmarried sex or non-procreative sex, and thus had overt moral implications, whereas sexual abstinence as an apparently descriptive term signified that somebody refrained from sexual activity.⁷ Nevertheless, today, as in earlier times, none of these terms is a purely factual description of somebody's sexual activity but they carry moral evaluations, both negative (something's wrong with that person) and positive (celibates maintain the purity of their bodies).⁸ Sometimes, these specific meanings are retained in today's discourses, but mostly, "celibacy" has lost its association with marital status and is used synonymously with chastity and abstinence to signify that somebody is not sexually active, with sexual activity usually referring to vaginal intercourse or – more broadly – to any intimate touching.⁹ As the absence of extramarital sex has always been more of an ideal than a fact – even more so today – caution is required when attempting to conclude from somebody's single unmarried (celibate) status that they are sexually abstinent.¹⁰ Since celibacy seems to be the most broadly-used term in both religious and non-religious contexts, I will use it here to denote somebody's sexual abstinence independently from their marital status.

In addition to terminological complexity, a further complication arises from the diversity of motivations for a celibate life and the forms it can take: celibacy can be chosen or not, it can be permanent or temporary, it may be motivated by a religious commitment or secular concerns, it can be a form of self-care and empowerment, it can express the rejection of the patriarchal structures underlying sexual relationships, it may be the consequence of traumatic sexual experiences, or it can be finalized toward traditional marriage.¹¹

Here, I limit myself to a consideration of celibacy and do not include asexuality, because the two are seen as distinct phenomena. The Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) defines asexuality in contrast to celibacy thus:

7 Cf. Karras 2012, pp. 35 f.

8 Cf. Kidder 2003, pp. 11 f.

9 The abstinence education group Life Choices, for example, defines sexual activity as "when the underwear zone of another person comes into contact with any part of your body" (cited in Andrews 2016, p. 31).

10 See Kidder 2003, p. 5; Kahan 2013, p. 10.

11 For a very clear, anthropological description of the phenomenon and its variations see Bell / Sobo 2001, pp. 3–26.

“Unlike celibacy, which is a choice, asexuality is a sexual orientation.”¹² While celibates might feel sexual attraction and desire – and some would argue that the struggle against these desires is a fundamental part of what it means to be celibate – asexual persons do not experience such feelings. However, as with celibacy, the term captures a range of experiences and self-understandings, and not all asexual persons might agree with AVEN's definition of asexuality as a sexual orientation or identity.¹³

3. A Thematic Discourse Analysis of Popular and Scholarly Discourses: Sources and Methods

Discourses on celibacy occur in many different spheres and consequently the material for this study is heterogeneous. I analyze webpages that promote celibacy, newspaper articles about the phenomenon and popular scholarly books on celibacy. I also include academic studies of celibacy among my primary sources because in their particular approaches to the topic, they also contribute to the construction of the concept of celibacy and to associated constructions of sex, body and gender. Sometimes they also quite openly or more implicitly advocate for celibacy as the better alternative to having sex.¹⁴ While this decision to include scholarly sources as primary material is not unproblematic, since it blurs the line between my data and the theoretical frameworks used to analyze it, I think it is relevant because it reflects the fact that no academic study is ever completely disinterested and descriptive but is, in its own way, a cultural practice that communicates and shapes worldviews.

All sources are from the North-Atlantic cultural context, especially the US and UK, yet are at least partly more widely accessible if web-based, and they offer insight into a range of discourses, from religious to secular, popular to scholarly, promotional to descriptive. As my methodological approach is qualitative, not quantitative, I do not claim to have included any and all available material but I focus consciously on what I consider a representative selection that I submit to a close analysis using the tools of discourse and thematic analysis.¹⁵ I analyze both textual and (in the case of webpages) visual elements to establish prominent themes, motifs and metaphors in order to gain insight into how discourses about celibacy express and construct worldviews, social reality and identity, reading for both what is written and what is not, reading both with and against the grain, and looking beyond what is explicitly stated for the values that are communicated implicitly.

12 Internet sources: AVEN.

13 Cf. Przybylo 2011.

14 E.g. Isherwood 2006; Cline 1993; Kidder 2003.

15 Cf. Hjelm 2011; Braun / Clarke 2006.

4. Results: Promises of Transformation and Problematic Continuations

Taking seriously the capacity of celibacy to make a world and the power of discourses to not only reflect but also to construct identities and social realities, the analysis of celibacy discourses from a feminist-theological perspective that looks critically at what hinders women from fully flourishing and what furthers the good life of all human beings, shows that these contemporary discourses include both positive and negative aspects, which in many ways continue historical discourses of celibacy. I will focus here on the most prominent ones: the use of a binary schema of thought and its consequences, the representation of sex, the treatment of self and relationships, the gendered nature of these discourses and the influence of the logic of consumer capitalism.

Rhetorically, the texts use a binary schema of positive-negative in the attempt to overcome the negative image of celibacy, expressed, for example, in celibates reporting that they are treated as “other” by their partnered friends or are considered sad, mentally troubled or abnormal.¹⁶ In order to achieve this image change, however, most texts resort to a negative representation of sex over against the positive view of celibacy, thus leaving in place the either/or pattern of evaluating different sexual practices. Such a pattern does not offer the possibility of appreciating both celibacy and sexual activity as valid expressions of sexuality or imagining sexual activity along a continuum of various forms. This binary pattern is often reinforced through the depiction of a society that promotes sexual promiscuity and is fundamentally opposed to celibacy.¹⁷ This distinction of celibates from mainstream society creates boundaries along the lines of sexual activity and thus supports the establishment of a minority identity for those who live according to a better value system by embracing celibacy.¹⁸ In a religious context, language of sacrificing sexual desire in favor of desire for God¹⁹ further expresses this exclusive binary. In this schema of thought, it is impossible to entertain the idea that desire for God might be expressed or experienced in the desire for another human being.

Dualistic patterns of thought in celibacy discourses also contribute to the perpetuation of the traditional body-mind dualism that values mental powers higher than bodily experiences,²⁰ which are seen as troublesome, instinct-driven

16 Cf. Fontanel 2011, pp. 26, 39; Cline 1993, p. 58.

17 Cf. Internet sources: Celibrate.

18 Cf. Gardner 2011, p. 24.

19 David Jensen (2013, p. 112) writes: “Celibacy is the willing restraint from sexual relations with another person, so that the celibate symbolizes in his or her body humanity’s ultimate desire for God”. See also Gardner 2011, p. 196; Southgate 2001, p. 257.

20 See for a discussion of such tendencies in early Christianity: Brown 1988, p. 78 (sexual abstinence seen to increase clarity of mind), p. 187 (only in its virgin state is the

Let's Talk about Celibacy!

and inferior, and of traditions that consider sexual experiences to cause a loss of reason.²¹ Since this dualistic view of the human person is also highly gendered – mind and reason are masculine, body and emotions are feminine – celibacy discourses continue these gender stereotypes, whether they mean to or not. The Wikihow page “How to Live a Life of Celibacy”, for example, promotes celibacy with the argument that it improves mental powers. A telling illustration in this particular section of the page shows a drawing of a male face with closed eyes, apparently concentrating inwardly, whereas the large majority of the other illustrations on the page represent women.²² Equally, the chastity movements that Christine Gardner analyzes express body-mind dualism by emphasizing that the decision to practice abstinence before marriage should be rational and not bodily-driven.²³ In her fictional-autobiographical description of a celibate period in her life, Sophie Fontanel also draws on body-mind dualism, for example when she describes a trip in her car: “We set off, my body and I, riding lightly in our convertible”, or calls her body her “envelope”.²⁴ Body-mind dualism is also expressed in the idea that the body needs to be controlled by a powerful mind or spirit,²⁵ with celibacy described as “an act of self-control which can show strength of character and can contribute to a stronger self-awareness”²⁶, or in the view that “you can reach the bliss stage without the physical bit”²⁷. On chastity.com, Matt Fradd quotes Josemaría Escrivá, suggesting that it is better to hold the body in slavery rather than be a slave to one's body.²⁸ Noticeably absent from these discourses is a holistic view of human existence that understands bodily experiences, including sexual desires, as a positive part of human being-in-the-world.

As already mentioned above, in celibacy discourses, sex is constructed as the exclusive “other” over against celibacy and primarily discussed in negative terms, including the contraction of STDs, unwanted pregnancy, abuse, exploitation or otherwise negative experiences of sex, especially for women in a patriarchal, consumerist context.²⁹ Fontanel understands the experience of being raped as

body as good as the mind) or p. 434 (will, e. g. in the willful constraint of sexual desires, connects a person with God). See also Karras 2012, p. 43 (Augustine criticizes sex because of lack of control); p. 44 (abstinence is recommended because it allows to focus on the mind and exert greater self-control).

21 Cf. Schillebeeckx 1981, p. 87; Kahan 2013, p. 124.

22 Cf. Internet sources: wikiHow to Live a Life of Celibacy.

23 Cf. Gardner 2011, p. 27.

24 Fontanel 2011, pp. 17 f.

25 E.g. Internet sources: Urban Chastity: Beginning again, where a celibate man writes that celibacy shows that “the spirit is way stronger than the physical”.

26 Cf. Internet sources: Celibate: Sexual abstinence.

27 Informant quoted in Internet sources: Seal.

28 Cf. Internet sources: Fradd.

29 E.g. Internet sources: Celibate: The benefits.

foundational for her need of a period of abstinence and describes sex as “being had”³⁰. Sally Cline sees sexual experience as inescapably contaminated by the genital myth of the patriarchal, capitalist order, and discusses the health dangers of sex at length.³¹ Lisa Isherwood emphasizes the essentially unequal nature of all sexual relationships under conditions of inequality and domination.³² Sex is compared to an addiction,³³ described as morally impure,³⁴ or, in more secular terms, as unhealthy,³⁵ destructive or repulsive, a part of our animal nature,³⁶ and fraught with negative emotional consequences and the loss of self-worth.³⁷ Physical closeness is not described as something positive but is considered a risk to be avoided because it might unleash sexual urges in a weak individual.³⁸ Sexual sins are consequently a permanent source of preoccupation for those attempting to live chastely,³⁹ but it is interesting to note what exactly is considered a sin: chastity.com, for example, lists pornography, masturbation, homosexuality and prostitution, but not rape.⁴⁰

Given these rhetorical constructions of sex as negative, the attempt to relativize a (perceived) social ideology of promiscuity and represent celibacy as a legitimate alternative, turns into outright sexphobia. The discourses do not allow for reflection on the possibility of a positive sexual experience nor on the conditions that might promote one. It is important to analyze how structural injustice impacts sexual relationships and I appreciate the positive effects of pointing out

30 Fontanel 2011, p. 12.

31 Cf. Cline 1993, pp. 6, 16 f.

32 Cf. Isherwood 2006, p. 3.

33 Cf. Internet sources: Urban Chastity: Beginning again; Internet sources: Anonymous.

34 Cf. Gardner 2011, p. 13. The impurity of sexual activity is a long-standing theme in celibacy discourses, see Karras 2012, p. 43; Brown 1988, p. 175. Interestingly, chastity movements have shifted to represent the life-long practice of “good sex” as pure rather than finding purity only in the avoidance of premarital sex (cf. Gardner 2011, pp. 29–32).

35 The idea that sex is unhealthy (because of STDs and emotional stress) is further underlined through the emphasis on the health benefits of celibacy and the absence of any mention of the possibility of abstinence-related emotional stress and consequent health issues (cf. Gardner 2011, p. 142). As Gardner notes: “It’s a savvy argumentation structure that begins with a moral and religious commitment and ends with a pragmatic and secular outcome.” (p. 35).

36 Matt Fradd offers his (intended) male audience the choice between animal (= sexually active) and saint (= celibate) (cf. Internet sources: Fradd).

37 Cf. Internet sources: Celibate: The benefits.

38 Wikihow admonishes never to be alone with somebody “unless you *absolutely know* that you can control yourself” (emphasis in the original; Internet sources: wikiHow to Live a Life of Celibacy).

39 Cf. Diefendorf 2015.

40 Cf. Internet sources: Suprenant.

Let's Talk about Celibacy!

that one does not need to be sexually desirable and active in order to be a complete person.⁴¹ Yet the lack of a reflection on the positive contributions of sexuality to the development of personhood is troublesome both from an anthropological and psychological perspective. Indeed, it reinforces a body-mind split in the human being and burdens the experience of sex with guilt, anxiety and shame, as is obvious from Becca Andrews's reflections on her own experience of being celibate:

I don't regret abstaining in high school, but the fear I picked up along the way hasn't been easy to shake. [...] When I did start having sex in my early 20s, even though I loved the man I was with, part of me felt disgusted with my body and overwhelmed with the experience. [...] I felt paralyzing shame at a basic expression of love.⁴²

Rhetorically, the focus on only negative aspects of sexuality functions to represent celibacy as the better – or even, only – choice, but it does not contribute to a well-rounded discussion of all aspects of embodied human existence and their role in human flourishing.

The framework for these discussions of sex is (with few exceptions) heterosexual,⁴³ intercourse-focused and conservative with regard to gender roles and life-choices, often with a fairy-tale heterosexual marriage promised as the ultimate reward for celibacy. Wikihow, for example, presents celibacy as the beginning of “legendary love stories”⁴⁴. Singleness as a positive life choice plays only a marginal role in the more popular celibacy movements, or is even stigmatized,⁴⁵ and the idea that a person might move flexibly between different forms of expressing her or his sexuality is not even entertained in this all-or-nothing rhetoric. While some discourses consciously construct celibacy as an alternative to the patriarchal, heteronormative social system,⁴⁶ most reinforce its conventions, even if in more subtle ways.

However, an interesting complication with regard to the understanding of sexual activity arises from the difficulty to negotiate what might be considered as “permitted” physicality in a chaste relationship that requires celibacy before marriage. While intercourse is the absolute taboo, each couple has to establish for themselves “how far they want to go”, and thus implicitly at least, their negotiations contribute to a more complex understanding of sex as comprising a variety of

41 Cf. Kidder 2003, p. 15.

42 Andrews 2016, p. 34.

43 Cf. for exceptions Internet sources: Celibrate: Frequently Asked Questions; and Internet sources: gwendolyn bond-upson; Cline 1993.

44 Cf. Internet sources: wikiHow to Live a Life of Celibacy; see also Internet sources: Celibrate: Real life (b); Gardner 2011, pp. 64–68.

45 Cf. Gardner 2011, p. 138.

46 Cf. Cline 1993; Isherwood 2006.

practices with different significance for different people.⁴⁷ This points to the difficulty of pinpointing the exact definition of sexual activity and might contribute to breaking up the binary of intercourse/celibacy and instead further the idea of a continuum of sexual activities.

A further complication of the dualistic view of sex as negative and celibacy as positive arises in discourses that promote celibacy before marriage. Here, the evaluation of sex is not a matter of an intrinsically negative value of sex over against an intrinsically positive value of celibacy. Rather, it is dependent on the context in which sex is practiced: sex outside of marriage is considered negative, but marital sex is promoted as a blissful experience worth waiting for.⁴⁸ While the contextualization of sexual activity allows for a more nuanced evaluation of sex, its exclusive association with marriage has problematic consequences, especially because of the way in which this association is framed discursively. Gardner points out that marriage-finalized celibacy discourses almost exclusively discuss the sexual aspect of marriage, thus leaving individuals unprepared to deal with other aspects of a relationship, such as conflicts and how to resolve them.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the expectation of perfect love and sexual relations in marriage that is created through celibacy discourses also does not take into account that love and sex are dynamic, a matter of growing together that often involves compromise. Even more problematically, individuals who practice celibacy before marriage often experience confusion when on their wedding night, they are suddenly faced with the need to find positive value in something that had previously been described as sinful, dirty and destructive. This serves as a clear sign that the strategy of promoting sexphobia in order to sell celibacy does not contribute to the wellbeing and flourishing of those involved.⁵⁰ The idea of being able to flip a switch⁵¹ that turns sex from repugnant to blissful seems to presume an innate capacity for good sex in all human beings given the right circumstances (i. e., marriage) and does not take into account the fact that good sex needs to be learned and practiced and requires knowledge of one's own and one's partner's body. Drawing on Mary Douglas's definition of dirt as matter out of place, Gardner notes that the positive evaluation of sex in marriage has the – maybe unintentional – effect of reinforcing the idea that sex outside of marriage (that is, sexual “matter” out of its proper place) is impure and dirty.⁵²

47 See for example Internet sources: Celibrate: Advice and support; Internet sources: Catholic Answer Chastity outreach: Chastity and Dating.

48 An expectation expressed by a celibate young man, see Internet sources: Urban Chastity: 30 Year Old Virgin.

49 Cf. Gardner 2011, p. 51.

50 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 50; Diefendorf 2015.

51 Cf. Gardner 2011, p. 50.

52 Cf. Gardner 2011, p. 43.

Let's Talk about Celibacy!

Given the negative views of sex as a source of STDs, unwanted pregnancy and emotional pain, celibacy movements paradoxically put much effort into making celibacy appear sexy by inviting attractive young individuals to testify at events, including photos of celibate celebrities with deep cleavage on their webpages⁵³ or promoting the ideal of the “sexy virgin”, an ideal that is as impossible to achieve for contemporary women as the Catholic ideal of the Virgin Mary as at the same time virgin and mother has been for women over the centuries.⁵⁴ This appeal to the sales power of sex suggests that celibacy discourses and movements do not embody an alternative to the sexed-up society they apparently criticize but rather commodify sexuality in order to sell their product, even if that product is not to have sex.⁵⁵

An important element in celibacy discourses is the construction of the self as rational (as mentioned above), autonomous and independent. In an appeal to feminism, the decision to live without sex is depicted as an act of autonomy and self-assertion, a free choice that expresses empowerment especially for girls or women in a patriarchal society.⁵⁶ By choosing celibacy, individuals achieve independence and agency, experiencing a sense of not being possessed by others⁵⁷ that does not seem to be possible in sexual relationships. This is expressed, for example, in Fontanel's explanation of her decision for celibacy: “I needed to feel all-powerful, believing it to be a requirement for disentangling myself from the schemes of men.”⁵⁸ As Cline notes, the emphasis on autonomy might also be seen as a reaction against the belittlement of the act of choosing celibacy in patriarchal discourses, which represent celibacy not as the free choice of a woman but rather as the consequence of not being attractive enough to find a man.⁵⁹ In addition to expressing freedom, celibacy is also represented as providing a greater opportunity for self-care by freeing up time to focus on one's needs⁶⁰ and to develop a sense of self-worth that is not based on external evaluations.⁶¹ Cline notes, “celibacy offers them [celibate women] the strength, the sense of personal identity and independence, the creative time and energy for their own growth and work,

53 Cf. Internet sources: Urban Chastity: Russell Wilson & Ciara.

54 Cf. Haworth 2013.

55 Cf. Gardner 2011, p. 12.

56 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 26; Internet sources: Celibrate: The benefits; Internet sources: gwendolyn bond-upson.

57 Cf. Cline 1993, p. 72.

58 Fontanel 2011, p. 17.

59 Cf. Cline 1993, p. 48.

60 Cf. Kahan 2013, p. 17.

61 Cf. Gardner 2011, p. 74. The theme of greater self-worth through celibacy is also much present on Internet sources: Celibrate: The benefits; Internet sources: Erskine. However, this might also revert into self-loathing if one fails to “control” oneself and uphold the pledge (Isherwood 2006, p. 79).

which conventional sexual activity has not allowed them”⁶². The webpage *your-tango.com* also notes that a celibate lifestyle offers more “me” time and frees up space and energy for self-esteem boosting activities.⁶³

Autonomy and self-care are certainly important for the flourishing of individuals, and feminist critique has clearly shown the detrimental effects on women’s development of the ideal of feminine self-effacement and self-sacrifice that has been promoted, not least, in Christianity.⁶⁴ However, the emphasis on autonomy and self-care in celibacy discourses also has some problematic aspects. First, Christine Gardner notes the use of peer pressure to convince participants to sign a pledge during the promotional events of premarital celibacy movements.⁶⁵ In addition, given the sex-negative rhetoric, choosing celibacy cannot be considered a true choice at all, because there is no valid alternative.⁶⁶ This suggests that the decision might not be as free as it is represented to be, which is also the case for all those who do not in fact choose their celibate lifestyle but just happen not to have sex at the moment for a variety of reasons, yet still want to find positive meaning in this situation. Second, the argument that celibacy allows for greater focus on the self is problematic in a culture already shaped by neo-liberal individualist egotism, as Isherwood points out.⁶⁷ No doubt, self-care is important for the positive development of an individual but certainly not at the expense of meaningful relationships. Because, third, it seems as if autonomy had to be paid for by sacrificing intimate relationships, which are represented as burdens with their demands in terms of time, energy and money. By pitching relationship against autonomy, celibacy discourses do not take seriously the need for relationship in the development of selfhood but contribute to the ideal of the atomistic, isolated, self-sufficient subject, traditionally gendered as masculine.⁶⁸

The negotiation of autonomy and relationship with its implications for gender is complex and deserves a closer look.⁶⁹ In general, relationships are represented as distractive, burdensome, a cost rather than a benefit, with domestic obligations that come with a live-in partnership and the negative emotions that arise when a relationship ends or conflicts need to be resolved.⁷⁰ Fontanel uses the problematic

62 Cline, 1993, p. 9.

63 Cf. Internet sources: *gwendolyn bond-upson*.

64 Cf. Johnson 2003, pp. 47–70.

65 Cf. Gardner 2011, p. 59.

66 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 27.

67 Cf. Isherwood 2006, p. 85.

68 Cf. the helpful summary of critiques of the autonomous subject in Mackenzie / Stoljar 2000, p. 5–11.

69 These arguments with regard to the burdensome aspects of relationships show a surprising resemblance with arguments used in the hook-up culture; a closer analysis of these parallels would be worthwhile, but exceeds the limits of this study.

70 Cf. Internet sources: *Celibate: Real life* (c).

Let's Talk about Celibacy!

relationships of her friends, described as “a dismal mess”, as a negative backdrop for her own state of singleness.⁷¹ Cline summarizes her relief when free from the burdens of relationship as “I was not servicing anyone” and speaks of the joy of having her meals in front of the TV.⁷² While positive descriptions of sexual relationships (certainly outside of marriage but also sometimes within, depending on whether the discourse finalizes celibacy toward marriage or not) are largely absent, non-sexual relationships are sometimes appreciated as less demanding, more equal and non-possessive.⁷³ The Shakers are often cited as a model for equal, non-hierarchical relationships within a celibate community with the accompanying creation of more equal gender roles,⁷⁴ and Benjamin Kahan discusses Father Divine's community in Harlem as a rare example of equal interracial relationships at that time, made possible because the members were celibate.⁷⁵ But given the heterogeneity of celibacy discourses, the evaluation of relationships is inconsistent and depends largely on the motivation for celibacy underlying the discursive structures of a particular text. For some – especially those choosing celibacy to consciously opt out of a patriarchal sexual order – only non-sexual relationships are acceptable, whereas for those who choose celibacy with a view to marriage, only sexual marital relationships are represented as worthwhile.

Some of the ways in which celibacy discourses construct gender, particularly women's subjectivity, have already been mentioned above. On the one hand, celibacy is represented as an alternative to the patriarchal order which manifests and is perpetuated in hierarchical sexual relationships as a way for women to claim agency and autonomy and to make female sexuality a site of resistance.⁷⁶ For women across history and cultures, celibacy has been a real possibility to escape from traditional gender roles,⁷⁷ even if it might have meant leaving their femininity behind and becoming “honorary males” through the transcendence of their sexual nature. In the context of Christianity, celibacy presented women with a lifestyle alternative to being a wife and mother, often with noticeably more autonomy and power than they ever could have had as married women.⁷⁸ As Isherwood writes, “Celibacy was the price, but a space in which women could gain a

71 Fontanel 2011, p. 147.

72 Cline, 1993, pp. 10 f.

73 Cf. the testimony of a man who speaks about the positive relationships with women he has had since living celibate, although he also mourns the fact that he hasn't made many new friends as a celibate man (Internet sources: Anonymous).

74 Cf. Cline 1993, pp. 194–209; Isherwood 2006, pp. 63 ff.; Collins 2001.

75 Cf. Kahan 2013, pp. 82–98.

76 Cf. for this explicitly feminist approach to celibacy Cline 1993, and from the perspective of queer liberation theology Isherwood 2006.

77 See for contemporary Japan where celibacy is seen as necessary for women to continue their career and escape the traditional role of housewife: Haworth 2013.

78 Cf. Karras 2012, pp. 39 ff.

sense of identity and tell a different story was the reward”⁷⁹. On the other hand, celibacy discourses focus noticeably more on women’s celibacy and the negative consequences of sex for women (pregnancy, abuse, etc.),⁸⁰ thus continuing the troublesome association of sexual desire with women. Furthermore, the obvious gendering of celibacy discourses continues stereotypical views of femininity and masculinity when they draw on sports and military metaphors and a “masculine” language of toughness to promote celibacy to boys/men and focus on emotions, self-worth, appearance and modest clothing for girls/women.⁸¹ For example, chastity promoter Tim Staples offers celibacy boot camps for boys through the webpage *chastity.com* and the same webpage includes articles such as, “Real Men Love Their Wives as Christ Loves His Church” by Leon Suprenant, or Matt Fradd’s “Oh, Chastity Is Too Hard? Man Up!”, which comes with an illustration of Batman.⁸² Gender stereotypes are also perpetuated in the motif of the fairytale marriage that is held up as the prize for abstinence in premarital celibacy movements: according to the narrative, the girl/woman passively awaits Prince Charming, her hero, who is instrumental in bringing about their “happy ever after”. This narrative might preserve a subtle form of feminine agency because women have the choice of husband,⁸³ but this seems preciously little activity in a tale that overflows with male action and reminds of the notion of “active passivity” promoted in more traditional Catholic gender discourses that are more interested in preserving women’s submission to men than encouraging their agency.⁸⁴

Because men are the stronger sex and better able to control their passion, they are also responsible for how physical their relationship with a woman may be. On *chastity.com*, Chad Etzel cites Fr. Thomas Morrow’s advice to an implied male reader on how to chastely say goodnight to his beloved: “You might put your hand to her face and move forward ever so slowly, and gently kiss her. Once. Twice. [...] Then say goodnight and kiss her once more, slowly, tenderly, as if you fear she might break if you aren’t careful.” The text reserves active verbs for the male part of the couple, whereas the woman is represented as fragile and passive.⁸⁵ However, men are also in danger of losing control over their powerful sexual urges, and

79 Isherwood 2006, p. 61.

80 Cf. Gardner 2011, p. 101.

81 Even the chastity rings one can buy at *urbanchastity.com* are different for men and women, using the more square, hefty design of the Maltese cross for men and an amethyst-gold design for women (Internet sources: Urban Chastity: Products). Cf. also Gardner 2011, p. 78.

82 Cf. Internet sources: Catholic answer chastity outreach: Tim Staples; Internet sources: Suprenant; Internet sources: Fradd.

83 Cf. Gardner 2011, p. 67.

84 Cf. Johnson 2003, pp. 64 ff.

85 Cf. Internet sources: Etzel.

Let's Talk about Celibacy!

then it is up to women in their weakness to act as “gatekeepers”: “A man is impressed by a woman’s sweet and gentle ‘No,’ if he has pushed her. It increases his respect and trust in her. It makes him want to be a better man, even if he’s been a player in the past.”⁸⁶ In addition, women may contribute to the effort of chastity by dressing modestly, an idea that reduces women implicitly to their appearance – something that celibacy discourses claim to counteract. This again emphasizes women’s sexual power over men and casts them as Eve in the traditional role of temptress and thus the one to blame for whatever might happen.⁸⁷

The last aspect I want to focus on is the way in which celibacy is integrated into a capitalist logic of the market. Celibacy itself is, of course, by now a considerable market.⁸⁸ But a capitalist rhetoric is also present in more subtle ways, for example when celibacy is promoted as freeing up time and energy so that one can focus on what is really important in life, namely one’s career and professional productivity, promoting a classically Weberian work ethics.⁸⁹ The idea that celibacy allows for greater focus is not new, but in earlier times and a religious context, the consequent greater capacity for concentration was used to focus the individual will on the divine.⁹⁰ In contrast, the blog *Urbanchastity* suggests that the self-control and capacity to overcome obstacles practiced in celibacy can prove beneficial for entrepreneurs.⁹¹ Cline also notes that women in demanding jobs seem to miss sex less and find celibacy easier,⁹² yet she does not consider whether meaningful relationships might also be important to balance the stress of professional life. The language of the market is also employed when celibacy is constructed as being “rewarded” by blissful marriage, as the “price” to be paid for the benefits of autonomy and selfhood or when relationships are described in terms of their “costs and benefits”.⁹³ A strangely quantitative, market-based understanding of sexual experience is reflected in this warning as well: “Every time you have sex it diminishes the special nature of how it’s meant to be.”⁹⁴

86 Internet sources: wikiHow to Live a Life of Celibacy.

87 Cf. Gardner 2011, pp. 74–77. For early Christian and medieval examples of the theme, see Brown 1988, p. 81; Karras 2012, p. 34. Peter Damian described the wives of priests, because of their sexual allure, as “appetizers of the devil” (quoted in Karras 2012, p. 53).

88 Cf. Gardner 2011, p. 7; for examples see Internet sources: Catholic answer chastity outreach: Online shop; Internet sources: Urban Chastity: Products.

89 Cf. Internet sources: wikiHow to Live a Life of Celibacy.

90 Cf. Brown 1988, p. 434.

91 Cf. Internet sources: Urban Chastity: New book; informant, quoted in Internet sources: Seal.

92 Cf. Cline 1993, p. 94.

93 Cf. Kahan 2013, p. 140; Isherwood 2006, p. 61.

94 Testimony on Internet sources: Celibrate: Real life (a).

While celibacy is sometimes seen positively as a challenge to consumerist society and the reproductive imperative,⁹⁵ there is also a noticeable attempt to argue that celibacy, while not procreative, is still productive in other ways so as to secure its place in a culture driven by the market.⁹⁶ While there is certainly nothing wrong with a focus on schoolwork or professional advancement, I think it is problematic if relationships and embodied experiences are sacrificed in order to be a more productive, docile member of capitalist society and if the value of human life is reduced to some kind of profit after expenses. Where does this leave relationships or experiences that have no obvious benefit in terms of productivity and yet mean so much for us? And what about the intrinsic value of the human being as created in God's image before and beyond all potential productivity? If celibacy is supposed to offer a real alternative to patriarchal gender relationships and consumerism, as Sally Cline suggests,⁹⁷ then it needs to be disentangled from the logic of consumer capitalism, both in its rhetoric and actual involvement in these mechanisms.

5. Conclusion: Talking about Celibacy Differently

Celibacy discourses construct a complex world with regard to sex, body and gender. On the one hand, they complicate the understanding of sexual activity and desire, disrupting the social tendencies that equate personal value with the number of one's sexual partners. Celibacy can be represented and lived as an alternative to unequal, possessive or even exploitative relationships and thus disrupt the binary gender system of patriarchal societies. It is seen as promoting autonomy and self-care and thus furthers central feminist concerns. Yet on the other hand, my analysis has shown that celibacy discourses are fundamentally shaped by a binary way of thinking that influences not only its rhetoric but also contributes to the perpetuation of gendered body-mind dualism, sexphobia and bodyphobia. In addition, celibacy discourses reaffirm highly problematic gender stereotypes that cast women as sexualized, yet weak and passive, whereas men are represented as "men's men", torn between sexual urges and rational control. Both in their more positive and more problematic aspects, celibacy discourses maintain themes that have already been prominent in earlier times, despite their apparent transformation into contemporary, modern and even feminist discourses. The question is, then, should celibacy discourses continue, and how could they be further transformed so that they contribute to creating conditions that further human flourishing?

95 Cf. Isherwood 2006, p. 72.

96 Cf. Kahan 2013, p. 91 (describing Father Divine's celibate community).

97 Cf. Cline 1993, p. 2.

Let's Talk about Celibacy!

I think it makes good sense to continue discourses on celibacy because they broaden our understanding of sexuality, what it means for human existence, and how it can be lived. The sheer discursive presence of celibacy as a sexual act challenges ideas about what it means to be sexual. Celibacy is one possibility to rupture the current sexual ideology, and while it is not completely possible to step outside the patriarchal framework because it is where we live, celibacy does offer, as Isherwood underlines, a queer possibility⁹⁸ to unhinge structures of inequality. The affirmation of celibacy's subversive or rebellious potential – even if it might not be consciously chosen or fully realized – also acknowledges the potential of body and embodied experiences to resist regulations imposed on our bodies and to establish new realities in and through our ways of bodily being, thus contributing to a more holistic view of the human person.

But in order for celibacy discourses to be able to develop this potential, I think they have to change in several ways in order to avoid the problematic aspects I have outlined above. In particular, celibacy discourses need to overcome dualistic forms of thinking with their underlying hierarchies and moral evaluations that pitch good celibacy against bad sex, sexual against non-sexual relationships, body against mind, desire against control and women against men. A person's life is not automatically better for being celibate, nor is someone a lesser moral being for enjoying sexual relations – even in a patriarchal order. Instead of disparaging relationships as burdens, their value of and contribution to the development of selfhood should be appreciated in order to increase awareness for the many different forms of relationship – even exclusive, intimate coupledness – in which we engage in our lives and the different ways we express them. The concept of relational autonomy seems to be a promising possibility for how to think of relationships and autonomy as mutually related instead of mutually exclusive, as “the focus of relational approaches is to analyze the implications of the inter-subjective and social dimensions of selfhood and identity for conceptions of individual autonomy and moral and political agency”⁹⁹.

Instead of talking about celibacy as the absence of sex, it would be important to work toward an understanding of celibacy as a form of sexuality on a continuum of many different forms and as a multiform phenomenon in itself. This presupposes a dynamic understanding of sexuality, subjecthood and identity in order to make space for persons for whom celibacy is a temporary stage in their life. Furthermore, if celibacy is to positively contribute to a rethinking of the sexual continuum, then it cannot be discussed as finalized toward marriage, as it happens in the more popular celibacy movements, because then it is simply a means to an end.

A more positive discourse of celibacy requires at the same time a more positive discourse of sex: I would argue that celibacy discourses can be constructive and

98 Cf. Isherwood 2006, p. 117.

99 Mackenzie / Stoljar 2000, p. 4.

positive only when they appreciate rather than denigrate other sexual experiences. In order to avoid casting celibacy and sexuality as polar opposites, the notion of sex should not be limited to intercourse and discussed in purely negative terms. Instead, both the range of ways in which different people live their sexuality and the positive aspects of sexual experiences have to be fully acknowledged.¹⁰⁰ Kidder notes that celibacy is not about the repression of sexuality but its transformation, and I would argue that this includes the transformation of both our experience and our conceptual understandings of sexuality.¹⁰¹ To understand celibacy as a form of sexuality also means to acknowledge and appreciate the sexual desires or experiences that are a part of the life of celibate persons without implying that they need to be avoided, overcome or sacrificed and to encourage their exploration in a life of celibacy. Cline's feminist proposal of "passionate celibacy" and Isherwood's queer theological model of "erotic celibacy"¹⁰² are promising in this respect because both affirm the sexual/erotic dimension of the celibate life. Their arguments could be reinforced if celibacy was not represented as an exclusive alternative to other, negatively represented forms of sexual relationships but rather as one of many possibilities on a continuum along which people might move flexibly across their lives.

In addition to broadening the spectrum of sexual experiences, bodily experiences also need to be seen as including not just the sexual in order to disrupt the reductive association of body with sex which does not fully capture the roles of either in human existence. A celibate person does not have to overcome his or her body and live a life of the spirit alone (as if this were possible). Instead, an appreciation of the body and its pleasures, sexual and otherwise, is important to undo the body-mind dualism that still characterizes celibacy discourses and much of society.

Finally, how can the entanglement of celibacy discourses with capitalist logics be addressed? There are some examples for how the egocentric tendency of celibacy can be balanced by a generous openness to others. For Pauline Steinmann, celibacy translates into additional energy and focus which allow her to open up into a stance of hospitality that is not calculated in terms of costs and benefits.¹⁰³ David Jensen also underlines that celibacy can encourage engagement for the common good.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, religious sisters interviewed by Cline emphasize how for them, the call to celibacy is a call to love all.¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, these authors and informants all have a Christian background, and so I suggest that the importance

100 For an example of how to broaden the perspective of what sexuality is and means see Steinmann 2008, p. 68.

101 Cf. Kidder 2003, p. 15.

102 Cf. Cline 1993; Isherwood 2006.

103 Cf. Steinmann 2008, p. 73.

104 Cf. Jensen 2013, pp. 112 f. (with reference to Lisa Cahill).

105 Cf. Cline 1993, pp. 128 f.

Let's Talk about Celibacy!

of relationality and the common good in Christianity can provide critical input for the further development of this aspect.

My hope is that this analysis of celibacy discourses and proposals for how to transform them will not only help to avoid some of their problematic aspects but also help to increase our understanding of sexuality in general. If celibacy is to be a queer space that is not defined by a patriarchal logic of inequality and by capitalist ideas of benefits and profit, as Isherwood suggests,¹⁰⁶ it cannot be separated from other social and sexual spaces, as though it were a little “celibate utopia”. Only when its utopian visions influence how other forms of sexuality are experienced can it make them, too, along the continuum of sexual expressions, spaces of equality, inclusion and human flourishing.¹⁰⁷

Bibliography

- Andrews, Becca: “Sex Negative”, in: *Mother Jones*, March/April 2016, pp. 28–35.
- Bell, Sandra / Sobo, Elisa J.: “Celibacy in Cross-cultural Perspective. An Overview”, in: Sobo, Elisa J. / Bell, Sandra (eds.): *Celibacy, Culture, and Society. The Anthropology of Sexual Abstinence*. Madison 2001, pp. 3–26.
- Braun, Virginia / Clarke, Victoria: “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology”, in: *Qualitative Research in Psychology* (3) 2006, pp. 77–101.
- Brown, Peter: *The Body and Society. Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. New York 1988.
- Carrither, Michael: “Foreword”, in: Sobo, Elisa J. / Bell, Sandra (eds.): *Celibacy, Culture, and Society. The Anthropology of Sexual Abstinence*. Madison 2001, pp. vii–x.
- Cline, Sally: *Women, Passion & Celibacy*. New York 1993.
- Collins, Peter: “Virgins in the Spirit. The Celibacy of Shakers”, in: Sobo, Elisa J. / Bell, Sandra (eds.): *Celibacy, Culture, and Society. The Anthropology of Sexual Abstinence*. Madison 2001, pp. 104–121.
- Diefendorf, Sarah: “After the Wedding Night. Sexual Abstinence and Masculinities over the Life Course”, in: *Gender & Society* (29/5) 2015, pp. 647–669.
- Elliott, Dyan: “Gender and the Christian Tradition”, in: Bennett, Judith / Karras, Ruth Mazo (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*. Oxford 2013, pp. 21–33.
- Fontanel, Sophie: *The Art of Sleeping Alone. Why One French Woman Suddenly Gave Up Sex*. Translated by Linda Coverdale. New York 2011.
- Gardner, Christine J.: *Making Chastity Sexy. The Rhetoric of Evangelical Abstinence Campaigns*. Berkeley 2011.
- Hjelm, Titus: “Discourse Analysis”, in: Stausberg, Michael / Engler, Steven (eds.): *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*. London 2011, pp. 134–150.
- Isherwood, Lisa: *The Power of Erotic Celibacy. Queering Heteropatriarchy*. London 2006.

106 Cf. Isherwood 2006, p. 11.

107 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 110.

- Jensen, David H.: *God, Desire, and a Theology of Human Sexuality*. Louisville 2013.
- Johnson, Elizabeth A.: *Truly Our Sister. A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints*. New York 2003.
- Kahan, Benjamin: *Celibacies. American Modernism & Sexual Life*. Durham 2013.
- Karras, Ruth Mazo: *Sexuality in Medieval Europe. Doing Unto Others*. London ²2012.
- Kidder, Annemarie: *Women, Celibacy, and the Church. Towards a Theology of the Single Life*. New York 2003.
- Mackenzie, Catriona / Stoljar, Natalie: "Introduction. Autonomy Refigured", in: Mackenzie, Catriona / Stoljar, Natalie (eds.): *Relational Autonomy. Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*. Oxford 2000, pp. 3–31.
- Przybylo, Ela: "Crisis and Safety. The Asexual in Sexusociety", in: *Sexualities* (14/4) 2011, pp. 444–461.
- Schillebeeckx, Edward: *Ministry. Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ*. New York 1981.
- Southgate, Paul: "A Swallow in Winter. A Catholic Priesthood Viewpoint", in: Sobo, Elisa J. / Bell, Sandra (eds.): *Celibacy, Culture, and Society. The Anthropology of Sexual Abstinence*. Madison 2001, pp. 246–263.
- Steinmann, Pauline: "Singleness and Sexuality", in: *Vision Fall* 2008, pp. 67–74.

Internet sources

- Anonymous: "Life without Sex – It's Better than You Think", in: *The Guardian*, 9 June 2014, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jun/09/sex-celibacy-friendships-women> [03.11.2015].
- AVEN. Asexual Visibility and Education Network, available at: <http://asexuality.org> [08.06.2016].
- Catholic answer chastity outreach, available at: <http://chastity.com> [10.06.2016].
- Catholic answer chastity outreach: Chastity and Dating: How Far Is Too Far?, available at: <http://chastity.com/article/chastity-and-dating-how-far-is-too-far> [19.12.2016].
- Catholic answer chastity outreach: Online shop, available at: <http://shop.catholic.com/chastity/> [19.12.2016].
- Catholic answer chastity outreach: Tim Staples, available at: <http://chastity.com/profile/tim-staples> [19.12.2016].
- Celibrate. Celebrating Celibacy, available at: <http://celibrate.org> [19.12.2016].
- Celibrate. Celebrating Celibacy: Advice and Support, available at: <http://celibrate.org/support.php> [19.12.2016].
- Celibrate. Celebrating Celibacy: Aims and Objectives, available at: <http://celibrate.org/aims.php> [10.06.2016].
- Celibrate. Celebrating Celibacy: Frequently Asked Questions, available at: <http://celibrate.org/faq.php> [19.12.2016].
- Celibrate. Celebrating Celibacy: Real life (a), available at: <http://celibrate.org/articles/adele.php> [19.12.2016].
- Celibrate. Celebrating Celibacy: Real life (b), available at: <http://www.celibrate.org/articles/bethany.php> [19.12.2016].

Let's Talk about Celibacy!

- Celibrate. Celebrating Celibacy: Real life (c), available at: <http://celibrate.org/articles/SarahJane.php> [19.12.2016].
- Celibrate. Celebrating Celibacy: Sexual abstinence, available at: <http://celibrate.org/abstinence.php> [19.12.2016].
- Celibrate. Celebrating Celibacy: The benefits of living without sex, available at: <http://www.celibrate.org/benefits.php> [19.12.2016].
- Erskine, Mandy: "What Does Self-image Have to Do with Chastity?", n.d., available at: <http://chastity.com/blog/what-does-self-image-have-to-do-with-chastity> [04.11.2015].
- Etzel, Chad: "How Far Is Too Far?", n.d., available at: <http://chastity.com/blog/how-far-is-too-far> [04.11.1976].
- Fradd, Matt: "Oh, Chastity Is Too Hard? Man Up!", n.d., available at: <http://chastity.com/article/oh-chastity-is-too-hard-man-up> [03.11.2015].
- gwendolyn bond-upson: "4 Reasons To Embrace Celibacy (That Don't Involve God)", at: Your tango, available at: <http://www.yourtango.com/201054530/4-non-religious-reasons-be-celibate> [10.06.2016].
- Haworth, Abigail: "Why Have Young People in Japan Stopped Having Sex?", in: *The Guardian*, 20 October 2013, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/20/young-people-japan-stopped-having-sex> [03.11.2015].
- Seal, Rebecca: "No Sex Please. The Joys of Celibate Life", in: *Telegraph*, 6 December 2010, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/sex/8168531/No-sex-please-the-joys-of-a-celibate-life.html> [03.11.2015].
- Suprenant, Leon J.: "Real Men Love Their Wives as Christ Loves His Church", n.d., available at: <http://chastity.com/article/real-men-love-their-wives-as-christ-loves-his-church> [10.06.2016].
- Urban Chastity – Teaching & promoting abstinence until marriage in urban communities!, available at: <http://urbanchastity.blogspot.de> [10.06.2016].
- Urban Chastity: 25 Celebrities Who Practiced Abstinence At Some Point In Their Lives, 9 June 2014, available at: <http://urbanchastity.blogspot.co.at/2014/06/25-celebs-who-practiced-abstinence-at.html> [19.12.2016].
- Urban Chastity: 30 Year Old Virgin. Worth the wait guy, 1 September 2014, available at: <http://urbanchastity.blogspot.co.at/search?updated-max=2014-10-20T08:23:00-04:00&max-results=15> [19.12.2016].
- Urban Chastity: Beginning Again – Practicing abstinence in the Real World – Lisa Raye McCoy – Tamara Mowry Housley – Mario, 6 August 2013, available at: <http://urbanchastity.blogspot.co.at/2013/08/beginning-again-practicing-abstinence.html> [19.12.2016].
- Urban Chastity: New Book, available at: <http://urbanchastity.blogspot.co.at/p/new-book.html> [19.12.2016].
- Urban Chastity: Products, available at: <http://urbanchastity.blogspot.co.at/p/products.html> [19.12.2016].
- Urban Chastity: Russell Wilson & Ciara are Practicing Abstinence!, 14 July 2015, available at: <http://urbanchastity.blogspot.co.at/2015/07/russell-wilson-ciara.html> [19.12.2016].
- wikiHow to Live a Life of Celibacy, available at: <http://www.wikihow.com/Live-a-Life-of-Celibacy> [10.06.2016].

Dr. Stefanie Knauss, Theology & Religious Studies, Villanova University, 800 Lancaster Avenue, Villanova, PA 19085, USA, stefanie.knauss@villanova.edu

Citation: Knauss, Stefanie: "Let's Talk about Celibacy! How Western Christian Culture Affects the Construction of Sex, Body and Gender in Popular and Scholarly Christian Discourses", in: Heller, Birgit (ed.): *Religion, Transformation and Gender*. (J-RaT 2017 / 2), pp. 84–104.

Datum der Publikation: 02.10.2017